

Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal

An International Threat for Europe's Rivers

THREAT TO NATURE

Large navigation facilities will irreversibly alter the natural riverine habitat (Gabčíkovo sluices, Danube, Slovakia). Photo © T. Pašteka

Meanders of the Morava river would be canalised by the D-O-E project. Photo © M. Stránský

Landscape for life, or the Canal?

Danube, Oder and Elbe Rivers

The Danube, Oder and Elbe rivers and their tributaries contain many of the most valuable nature areas in Europe. In the Czech and Slovak Republics these include floodplain forests, wet meadows and oxbows such as the **Morava-Dyje Floodplains** and a valuable mosaic of wetlands such as those of the **Poodří Protected Landscape Area** along the Oder River. Along the Elbe at the **Labské Pískovce Protected Landscape Area** – there are invaluable canyon landscapes with wet meadows,

forests and peatlands. These and other valuable areas among the Danube, Oder and Elbe rivers will be included in the European Union's so-called Natura 2000 network of specially protected areas.



White Stork. Photo © T. Pašteka

The Canal

The historic enlargement of the European Union is blowing new wind into the sails of political and business interests that are interested in resurrecting long-standing plans to develop a canal linking the Danube, Oder, and Elbe rivers. Development of the planned canal, which would enable ships to travel from the Baltic and North Seas in northern Europe to the Black Sea in the southeast, would be a massive undertaking. It would **total some 1,980 km** in length and flow through Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and



Floodplain forests along the Danube, Oder and Elbe rivers are priority habitats for Europe. Photo © T. Pašteka

Austria. Initial estimates of the **costs total 6455.5 Million USD**. This is only an initial estimate of direct costs, without mitigation measures. It is more than likely that this estimate is overly optimistic and will increase in the future.

The project has already been included in the EU's plans for a network of transport corridors for Europe – the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T) – which foresees the canal linking two waterways: the E20, from Germany to Austria (**Hamburg-Magdeburg-Pardubice-Prerov-Danube**); and the E30, from Poland to Austria (**Szczecin-Wrocław-Kozle-Ostrava-Prerov-Danube**).

Economic arguments ignore the significant and long-term costs that such a project will have on the environment, and consequently on people. Experience shows that regulation of rivers destroys the unique biological diversity of river systems, leads to severe degradation in water quality, and significantly increases the frequency and severity of flooding.

Rare *Clematis integrifolia* occurs frequently on the Morava-Dyje Floodplains. Photo © V. Stanová

The canal and European Legislation

The Danube-Oder-Elbe canal will breach the provisions of **EU Directives 92/43** and **79/409** (the so-called **Habitats and Birds Directives**) as well as both the **Bern** and **Ramsar Conventions**.

Hundreds of species of flora and fauna, birds and habitats, legally protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives, **would be threatened** by the project. Construction of the canal would destroy and alter habitats and fragment populations of species, leading to **loss of biodiversity**. Nesting areas of birds would be disturbed and destroyed by construction.

The **canal would divert water** from sections of the Morava, Oder and Elbe rivers – rivers whose water resources are already limited. These limited water resources for operating the canal would be diverted, for example the section Vienna-Hodonín (lower Morava) and for the highest sections of the Oder and Elbe during their low water periods. Natural rivers would suffer from reduced discharge and become stagnant – this stagnant water would exacerbate the eutrophication processes in the artificial canal and impounded river stretches. Disruption of hydrological regimes threatens unique floodplains, meadows, and forests, and negatively impacts upon wetlands that are dependent upon river hydrology.

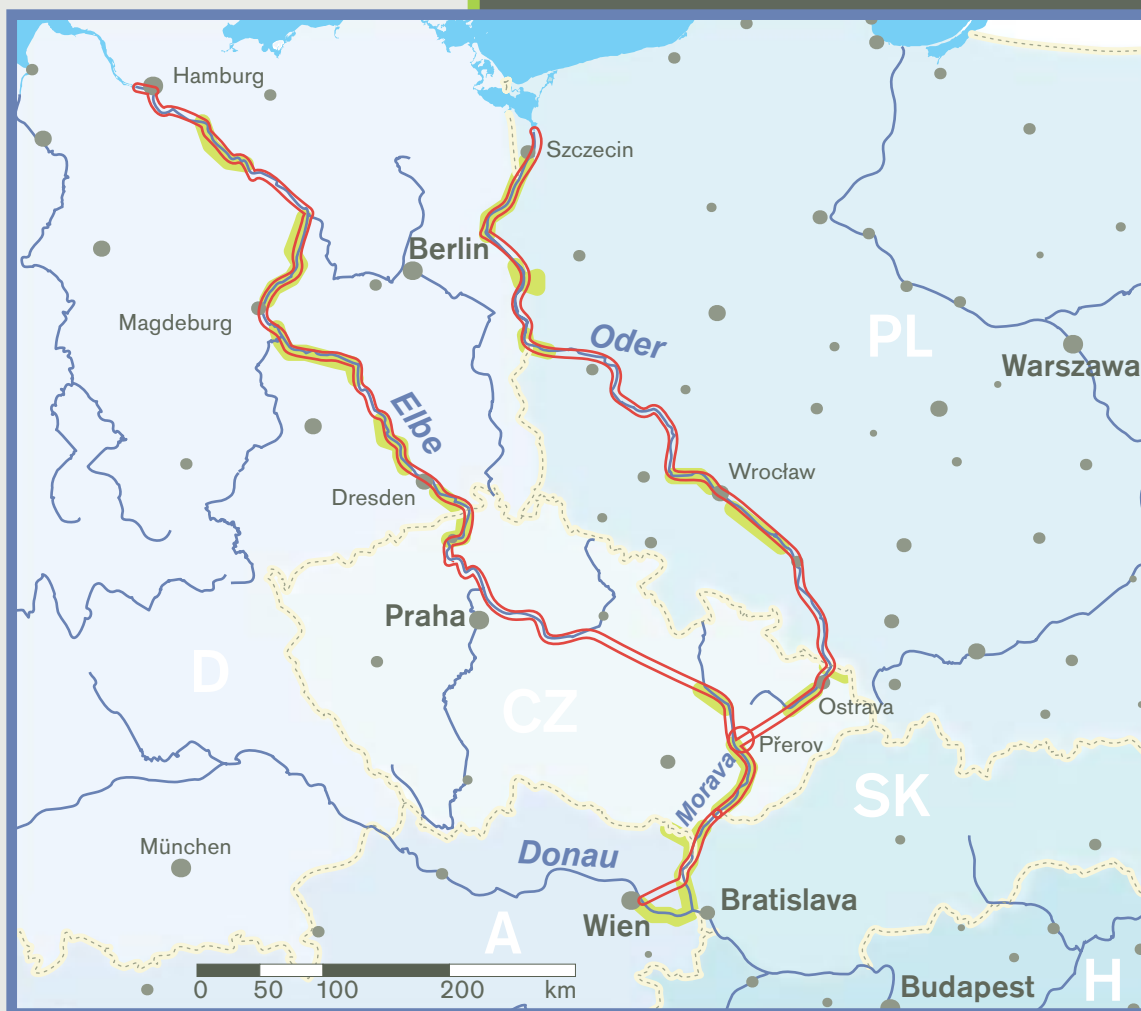


The Danube-Oder-Elbe canal will also breach the provisions of the **EU Water Framework Directive**. The ambitious Water Framework Directive sets the scene for integrated and international river basin management across Europe, aiming at environmental objectives that will deliver ecological quality improvements for freshwater ecosystems across the whole continent. Construction of the canal would take an estimated 10-20 years, a period during which the EU's Water Framework Directive, will have been implemented.




The beauty of floodplain forests. Photo © T. Pašteka

The canal **would impact (directly and indirectly) on 400,000 hectares in 61 protected areas** – not including areas that in future will be included in the EU's Natura 2000 conservation network. Development of the canal could cause the exclusion of areas from Natura 2000 that have already been identified for the network.



Map prepared by
DAPHNE and WWF

 Protected Nature Areas

 Proposed Canal

Danube-Morava branch

Austria-Slovakia-Czech Republic

170km from Vienna northeast over the lower Morava river and floodplains to Pířerov (Czech Republic).



Oder Branch

Czech Republic-Poland-Germany

First section: over 100km from Pířerov to Ostrava (upper Oder river, Czech Republic).

Second section: over 46 km from Ostrava to the Gliwice canal in Poland.

Third section: from Poland to Szczecin and the Baltic Sea. The Oder river is only navigable to a limited extent, so 360 km of the river would need to be regulated (from Wrocław to the mouth of the Warthe).

Elbe Branch

Czech Republic-Germany

First section: over 150km from Pířerov to Pardubice (upper Elbe river, Czech Republic).

Second section: over 870 km from Pardubice to Hamburg, Germany.



Will nature disappear due to development? Photo ©
T. Pařteka





Natural floodplains mitigate effects of floods and protect downstream human settlements. Photo © T. Pašteka

This factsheet has been produced by Daphne, WWF and BUND-Berlin. Financing was provided by WWF, Umweltstiftung and BUND-Berlin.

Contacts:

Daphne – Institute of applied ecology

Milan Janák
Hanulova 5/D
844 40 Bratislava, Slovakia
Tel: +421-2-654 121 62
Fax: +421-2-654 121 33

daphne@changenet.sk
www.daphne.sk

WWF European Policy Office

Ellen Townsend
36 avenue de Tervuren Box 12
1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32-2-740 09 21
Fax: +32-2-743 88 19

ETownsend@wwfepo.org
www.panda.org/epo

BUND Berlin e. V.

Jeroen Kuiper
Crellestr. 35
10827 Berlin, Germany
Tel: +49-30-78 79 00-32
Fax: +49-30-78 79 00-18

jkuiper@bund-berlin.de
www.bund-berlin.de

What we want

The planned Danube-Oder-Elbe canal would have a massive negative impact on invaluable nature areas and the environment more generally across Central Europe. It would cost a fortune, while yielding very uncertain economic benefits.

Therefore, we demand:

▲ A full **stop to any further research or plans** for construction of the canal.

▲ **No public funds** from the European Union or relevant governments be provided for the canal.

▲ The Danube-Oder-Elbe canal **be removed from the EU's TEN-T plans** as well as **from regional development plans** in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Austria and Germany.

▲ **Support for realistic transport alternatives** in Central Europe, including modernisation of the existing railway network.

▲ Awareness raising, and **support for natural wealth of Central Europe**: untouched rivers and nature should be the basis for sustainable development.

▲ Strategic **Environmental Impact Assessment must be urgently undertaken** to investigate all developments which may threaten current and future **Natura 2000** sites in Future member States.

Life on floodplains has adapted to flooding over many centuries. Photo © T. Pašteka

